

NEWS RELEASE



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Partner Proposals Sought to Target USDA Farm Bill Funds

INDIANAPOLIS, February 11, 2009—USDA has announced that up to \$58.4 million in financial assistance is available to agricultural producers and entities through the new Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), established in the new Farm Bill to promote ground and surface water conservation and water quality improvement.

AWEP projects will be selected through a competitive request for proposals. Eligible partners must identify a target geographic area in their proposal. They must also identify specific practices to be funded and agree to help promote these practices. Eligible partners include Federally-recognized tribes, states, units of local government, agricultural or silvicultural associations or groups of such producers like irrigation associations or an agricultural land trust. Once an area is selected, producers who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production are eligible to have conservation contracts under the program. Producers in selected project areas will apply for assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) at their local USDA Service Center.

“AWEP is designed to address water quantity and quality issues at a regional level,” according to Jane Hardisty, state conservationist for USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). “The intent of AWEP is to leverage federal investments in natural resources conservation with the services and resources of other partners. By combining available resources, we can deliver more conservation assistance on private working lands.”

The types of practices that might be funded under AWEP could include:

- Water quality or water conservation plan development, including resource condition assessment and modeling;
- Water conservation restoration, including conversion to the production of less water-intensive agricultural commodities;
- Water quality or quantity restoration or enhancement projects; and
- Irrigation system improvement or irrigation efficiency enhancement.

Partners can submit proposals electronically at <http://www.grants.gov/apply>. Hard copy proposals must be postmarked by March 2, 2009. USDA published a Request for Proposals for

AWEP in the Federal Register on Jan. 14, 2009. To access the regulations, visit the Federal Register at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/>.

For additional information about AWEP, and links to the Federal Register announcement, visit the NRCS AWEP Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/awep/>.

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